16: Hanks & Hanks E,P-4,5 (1938-1941) 1950
NF6 Blackfoot NF6
Northern Blackfoot
Blackfoot Reserve

Because so few Blackfoot speak and write English adequately, this letter is similar to many received by the agent. This impression of immaturity is furthered by the constant appeal for funds from a given account in the agency, and the common practice of working only when in need of cash.

Consider also meetings of the councils of chiefs. The chiefs enter the room feet clad in moccasins, wearing somewhat shabby suits or brightly coloured cowboy shirts, their heads often covered with red bandanas on top of which sit broad-brimmed, dusty hats. Some sit on chairs, others find greater comfort sitting tailor fashion on the floor. Most chiefs must communicate through an interpreter, and those who speak English often use broken English with phrasing comical to the white ear. In view of the white tendency to consider seriously only words addressed by persons who dress correctly, speak in proper ways, and know approved decorum, the agency cannot consider the chiefs equal partners in the direction of reserve affairs.

Like other agencies, the Blackfoot agency's policies are determined in part by the expectations of the Indian Affairs Branch at Ottawa. A good reserve is one where production is aimed at maintaining or achieving a level considered adequate for the people. There should be a low index of crime, divorce, disease and, if possible, few complaints by Indians or their white neighbours. To the extent possible there should be a decreasing rate of expenditure out of public funds and an increasing rate of school attendance. In these respects the Blackfoot agency stands well. Through competent agency management production has been maintained fairly well in certain respects and increased in others. We have no indices to compare crime, divorce, and complaint rates from this agency with other agencies, but judging by the tendency for Indians to remain on the reserve, complaints at least should be low from the Blackfoot area. It is probable that the mild encouragement given to Blackfoot religious ceremonials is considered a step towards maintaining native moral sanctions. Certainly the Blackfoot hospital offers a health service that surpasses that of many communities in the vicinity. Thanks to the trust fund, public money expended for the reserve has reached a minimum, and nearly every child goes to school.

With respect to the Indians three administrative principles appear to be operative. First is the principle of preventing the Indians from having too great benefits from the trust fund at any one time, lest they become demoralized. On this ground many

343
●516

Fig. 8 — South Peigan sweat lodge in use. Photo courtesy of the Cranbrook Institute of Science.

574 announcing loudly for some visitors that he was inviting for supper, right the first evening when they got there.

231 The menfolks went out to stake the horses—that is, the saddle horses. They let the team horses go to graze, the ones that pulled the loaded wagons. They put the saddles and harness just inside the doorway, to the south. If there was a spare tent then they put the saddles and harness in there, and if my grandmother got too many visitors then she would put them in there too.

574 If the visitor was a well-known person he brought his family into the tipi too. Otherwise just the man would come, or he would bring his wife, if she was invited. Since there is no town or store close by the Sun Dance grounds my grandmother would have to get prepared before they went to camp. They'd be there for three or four weeks, and they would get a lot of visitors that they had to feed. My grandmother used up a lot of grub during that time.

Oh, my, I still remember very clearly how my grandmother's tipi looked when it was completely furnished and full of guests. Because my grandfather was a religious leader he usually had important people coming to see him, so I was taught from the start not to bother them or fool around in the tipi.

252 When my grandmother started to cook she got down on her
• 516 knees and that was how she worked; she didn't get up and down a lot. She had a circle of rocks laid around in the center, and she made an open fire in there. She didn't have no such thing as a tin camp stove, or those modern Coleman stoves that people are using nowadays. She had her foodstuff piled by her, and she sat so that she could reach her firewood, which was on the same side as the saddles and harness. Her foodstuff was mainly dried meat, flour, baking powder, berries, potatoes, fat, sugar, salt, and tea. She didn't keep much fancy food. I hardly knew her to buy canned stuff by the case, like a

to him, just on the other side of him and his bundles. The people who had medicine pipes and beaver bundles always sat closest.

The men all sat cross-legged on the bed, wherever they were shown. Of course, the men always sat on the north side of the tipi and the women on the south. If a man was accompanied by his wife, she usually sat in the same place on the women's side as her husband was given on the men's. But the women never sit cross-legged. They sit with their legs either folded back to one side or else straight out.

After all the food was served out then my grandmother would serve out the beverage. Let's say she had tea. She would fill all the cups with tea and then pass them around to the guests. When they are through eating they just push their plates out away from themselves, and she comes around to pick them up. Then she sits back down by the fire and washes all her dishes right away. Most of the visitors brought their own plates and bowls, especially if they were religious people. If there was food left over at the end, she would divide it out among the bowls, and the visitors would take it home with them.

My uncle, Joe Heavy Head, was the one who usually did the chores and outside work around the tipi. He was their oldest son and he usually slept toward the back. He looked after the horses, and he went down to the bush for water and wood. My grandfather had no time for any chores because he was a religious leader. People kept him busy making announcements in the camp, or looking after their medicine pipe bundles. My grandmother had a lot of religious duties to take care of, too. On certain days she did all her day's work right in the morning, because she would be gone with her religious work the rest of the day.

574 in and relax and watch me go about my work. Of course, they
123 don't hesitate to point out my mistakes, which helps me to learn.

354 After we camped at that first Sun Dance with only an open fire in my tipi, I have come to appreciate having a wood-burning campstove besides. I set it up right next to the fireplace, on the side toward the doorway. I put up a high enough chimney to keep the smoke higher than the eyes of a standing person. Usually we put wire around the chimney and tie the ends to two opposing tipi poles, to keep it from falling down.

354 The worst thing about the open fire was the smoke that
372 turned many of my cooking sessions into tearful agonies, Also, the open fires limited the kinds of meals I could cook, and eagerly burned any meals I didn't cook just right. Finally, the open fires sent sparks flying around the tipi to burn our bedding and endanger the occupants, whenever I used the wrong wood. I thought at first that much of my open fire trouble was due to the wrong wood (pine being worst and cottonwood best), but I found that even a slight change in the wind direction outside kept the smoke from going up properly. Often it congregated right at about my work level. Getting and keeping enough dry wood on hand was still another problem, since wet wood on an open fire is a real disaster.

342 In some ways my camp is not much different from my
352 great-grandmother's, when my mother stayed with her. I use
353 similar bedding, tripods, and backrests, and a trunk for clothing and dance outfits. I have a fireplace and an altar for making incense for the medicine bundles. Best of all, I have a tipi that gives each camping experience that ageless good spirit of my ancestors.

352 But I also set up a table inside my tipi to cook on. I wasn't
[516] raised on the ground like my grandmothers, so I find it hard to be comfortable while working that way for long. I bring a kerosene lamp for lighting, a cooler to hold drinking water, and a couple of chairs for those of our old people who have a hard time getting up and down.

Before he entered he coughed; the people inside all sat in order. The messenger went inside. He put his robe on the right-hand side of the door and he went around the tipi making downward brushing motions on the People, except for the holy woman and her helpers. He passed in front of her and continued to make downward brushing motions on the men. When he got back to his robe he picked it up, secured it around his waist, and sat down. He sat on one of his feet. 793 796 [526] [516]

The messenger told them, "I came over to notify you that the Horns Society has finished the preparations." Neither the holy woman nor her husband spoke a word. The priest spoke, saying to everyone in the tipi, "Everything is prepared." And then, someone in the Holy Lodge who counted the tongue slices told the messenger there were not enough. The messenger immediately returned and told this to the Horns. Some Horns members went out of camp to get more beef tongues. They brought these tongues to the holy woman's tipi, where they were cut and sliced and set to dry. 793 796 575

At the Horns tipi, they selected their best singers from amongst the members. The singers formed themselves into two rows, the men in one row, the women in the other. They paraded to the east side of the camp circle. Then, starting at the east entrance they paraded by all the camps within the camp circle. At each camp they stopped and sang. After singing their song, one of the men called out: "Woo-Ka-Hai! For you People all to know: after tomorrow a sweat lodge will be constructed. Nobody is to leave the camps, so that we will all help with the construction of the Holy Lodge. We all will work on it after tomorrow." 796 575 533 [203]

The reason why the Horns set this date to build the lodge was so that there would be time for the newly cut tongues to dry. The tongues were to be used in two days' time.

The next morning everything was arranged, and the following morning the sweat lodge was 796 346 575

[p. 46-B]

122 796 cover that the two female assistants, seated on his right, were Mary Ground and Maggie Bear Child (Plenty Treaty's wife).

I am an observant person, I think—or at least I try to be—but when 122 I observe people it is usually a conscious and sometimes a strenuous 151 act on my part (occasionally there is the embarrassing moment 796 when I am caught staring). But I have discovered that my Indian friends, who usually appear not to notice anything or anybody, are actually more observant than I—in fact they don't miss a thing. Jimmy was one of the functionaries at the ceremony—he sat cross-legged and cut tobacco with a knife on a brass tack-decorated wooden cutting board, and he filled and lighted the long ceremonial pipe and performed various other functions. I didn't think he took special notice of anything or anybody. But when later I asked him to explain some of the rituals—who had done what when and why—my omnipercipient Indian brother was able to give me the most intimate detail of anything that had happened at any time during the ceremony. I would have liked to take some pictures and do a [126] tape of the ceremony, but, feeling that this would be a tourist-like intrusion, I did not seek permission. But I wanted to include in this journal the names of the people present at the Beaver Dance, and when later in the day I asked Jim to help me out, he was able, without the slightest hesitation, to name them all. On the Chief's left, in correct order, were Louis Bear Child, Fish Wolfrobe, James White Grass, Tom Many Guns, Henry Little Dog, Charlie Horn, Joe Morning Gun, James White Calf, Richard Last Gun (myself), Juniper Old Person, Jim Buffalo, Paul Many Hides, and Francis Redhorn. To the right of the Chief: Mary Ground, Maggie Bear Child, Mrs. Tom Many Guns, Mrs. Fish Wolfrobe, Mrs. Charlie Horn, Mrs. Joseph Morning Gun, Mrs. Jim Buffalo, Mrs. Molly Arrowtop, Mrs. Phillip Many Hides, and Mrs. Henry Little Dog. All these people 122 were seated on the floor, and there were others that could not find 796 seats and so stood in doorways or along the walls. I was relieved to see that not everyone sat cross-legged because I am currently unable 516 to sit in this manner—I can fold under one leg at a time, but not both at once.

[533] The four drummers all sat cross-legged, and they were positioned, as at the Pipe Dance, in a row in front of the women. But this time the drum rhythm was not a pulsing, heart-like, hard-soft beat. This time the drumming was a rapid steady pounding. But it was much more than that. Perhaps a musician could explain how the drummers achieved such an unusual effect with their steady pounding drumming. I cannot.

516

Blackfeet at leisure, during a respite in the trading session.

[p. 100-C]